

# SMASHED

● Bailiffs, bulldozers and police take action at the Hovefields site

● Empty buildings on illegal camp to be ripped out in 4-day operation

COUNCIL bosses showed they mean business in their battle against illegally camped travellers by demolishing half of a controversial camp.

Yesterday, as the Echo revealed council leader Tony Ball's promise to step down if 90-odd traveller families were not ousted, bailiffs were sent in to crush six plots at the site in Hovefields Drive, Wickford.

The operation could last up to four days, and involves smashing up empty buildings and hardstandings, and then mounding earth up around the pitches to prevent them becoming reoccupied.

Shocked families, living on the eight remaining pitches, criticised the council for starting clearance without warning. They claimed some of the bulldozed plots were still occupied, and the owners were just away for the summer.

This was disputed by the council and bailiffs, Constant

By JON AUSTIN  
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& Co, who said no warning was needed because the homes had been deserted for some time.

Council leader Tony Ball said: "Although this is not the beginning of a forced eviction, it is important residents and travellers realise this is the start of returning the sites of Hovefields and Dale Farm back to their green belt status."

"We did not have to serve the 28-day notices for the empty plots which were demolished, as the notices are to warn people they are at risk of becoming homeless."

"But there was no one on these sites."

The clearance is the first sign the council's lengthy negotiations with travellers have led to some families choosing to move off without being forced.

He added: "The council has worked closely with the travellers at Hovefields to achieve a

peaceful settlement to the current situation.

"As a result of this work, three plots have now been vacated on land north of Hovefields Drive, and a further four have been vacated at Five Acre Farm. Some people moved off of their own accord. Other plots had been empty for some time."

A small number of police were on the site with other officers on standby in case of trouble, while a private security firm also oversaw the work.

At the time of going to press, Mr Ball said there had been no arrests.

It is important travellers realise this is the start of returning the sites to green belt status



■ Action – the bulldozers move in

Pictures: RON POULTER BA32927-1

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■ Clean-up operation – one of the trucks brought in to take the debris away

BA32927-2

## 'Animals are treated better'

A WOMAN on the site claimed travellers were treated worse than animals.

Sylvia Taylor, 62, who has lived at the unauthorised site for eight years, learnt her pitch, called Merryfield, was due for demolition yesterday.

However, with the help of campaigner Grattan Puxon and a solicitor, she convinced the council not to do it

because she was still living there. She told the Echo: "They were supposed to give us 28 days' notice, but my yard was marked to be dug up."

"After Mr Puxon got involved, they sent a message to the bailiffs not to touch my plot. It's devastation for the other people. "The council haven't given us anywhere to go. Animals get treated bet-

ter." Mrs Taylor, who lost her father, husband Jess, and sister-in law earlier this year, seemed resigned to defeat.

She added: "I think eventually we will all be moved out with nowhere to go."

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